

(LAIRD)

WASHINGTON--DEFENSE SECRETARY LAIRD SAID TODAY THAT THE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY WAS CONSULTED ON A CONTINUING BASIS ABOUT THE SON TAY RAID, AND AT NO TIME CLAIMED TO HAVE INFORMATION THAT THE PRISONER OF WAR CAMP WAS EMPTY.

LAIRD SAID HE WAS SITTING WITH CIA DIRECTOR RICHARD HELMS WHILE THE RAID WAS IN PROGRESS, AND THAT HE COULD REMEMBER "HEARING THE CLOCK TICK" AS THEY WAITED APPREHENSIVELY FOR NEWS OF THE DEVELOPMENTS.

SEN. J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT, D-ARK., CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, SAID HE HAD BEEN INFORMED THAT HELMS WAS NOT CONSULTED. LAIRD SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WAS NO STATEMENT THAT COULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO HELMS ON THE SUBJECT.

ACTUALLY, HE SAID, CONSULTATIONS WITH THE CIA WENT BACK AS FAR AS LAST MAY AND CONTINUED "RIGHT THROUGH TO THE DAY OF THE RAID."

LAIRD, WHO SAID HE ALONE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR RECOMMENDING THE RAID, SAID THE INFORMATION WAS ALWAYS SUCH THAT NEITHER HE NOR THE CIA COULD BE CERTAIN THAT U.S. PRISONERS OF WAR WERE STILL HELD AT SON TAY.

BUT WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE CIA CLAIMED TO HAVE INFORMATION THE PRISONERS WERE NOT THERE, LAIRD SAID, "THE ANSWER IS 'NO.'"

ON OTHER SUBJECTS, LAIRD SAID:

--COMMUNIST INFILTRATION INTO SOUTH VIETNAM HAS BEEN LESS IN 1970 THAN IT WAS IN 1969. IN FACT, THE MAJOR NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY OPERATIONS ARE NOW IN CAMBODIA AND LAOS RATHER THAN IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

I --THERE IS NOTHING IN THE MILITARY PICTURE TO PREVENT A FURTHER REDUCTION IN U.S. TROOPS IN VIETNAM TO LESS THAN 284,000 BY NEXT MAY 1, LAIRD SAID THE STRENGTH IS ALREADY BELOW 344,000, THE GOAL SET FOR CHRISTMAS AND THAT IT WILL BE WELL BELOW 340,000 BY NEXT JAN. 5, WHEN ANOTHER CONFERENCE ON FURTHER WITHDRAWALS FROM VIETNAM IS TO BE HELD IN HONOLULU.

I --LAIRD AND ADM. THOMAS H. MOORER, CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, WILL LEAVE WASHINGTON JAN. 5 FOR A TOUR OF THAILAND AND SOUTH VIETNAM. THEY WILL TRAVEL VIA PARIS, WHERE THEY WILL CONFER WITH U.S. PEACE NEGOTIATORS.

--LAIRD SAID HIS STATEMENT TO CONGRESS THAT THE U.S. WILL MAINTAIN TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM UNTIL U.S. PRISONERS OF WAR ARE SURE OF RELEASE DOES NOT AFFECT FURTHER WITHDRAWALS, EXCEPT THAT COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL COULD NOT BE EFFECTED UNTIL THE POW QUESTION IS SETTLED.

--A PROGRAM FOR DESTRUCTION OF ALL U.S. BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS, EXCEPT THOSE RETAINED FOR A "MINIMUM DEFENSE RESEARCH PROGRAM," HAS BEEN COMPLETED AND WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN A FEW DAYS. LAIRD SAID THE PENTAGON WILL ALSO ANNOUNCE A NEW PROGRAM FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN THE ARMED FORCES.

12/15--MB 1225P

A214

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AP NEWS DIGEST
Wednesday AMs

WASHINGTON

Justice William O. Douglas apparently was cooperating with the CIA in one of the activities for which his House critics want to impeach him, a House committee report indicates.
New, Adv 6:30 p.m. EST.

The House prepares to reassert its confidence in the supersonic transport program by approving a compromise \$210 million to continue work, but the SST's fate in the Senate remains clouded.
Developing.

Former Secretary of the Interior Walter J Hickel's request for an appointment to brief President Nixon on a trip abroad was rejected in a White House letter signed by an assistant to an assistant.

New and exclusive, A207

TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE 15 Dec 70
TO: Jmm		
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REMARKS:		
<p>- UPI item from Secy, held news conference: DCI consulted on bid and was with bid while bid was in progress.</p> <p>- House Committee report will claim Justice Douglas cooperating with Agency in one of activities his critics want to replace him for. to be released at 6:30 PM</p>		
FROM: RU		
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FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

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